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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003788

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/08/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [VE](#) [US](#)

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN VICE PRESIDENT RANGEL ON BILATERAL ACCESS

Classified By: DCM Stephen McFarland

1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met December 8 with Vice President Rangel to get a read on bilateral access. Stressing he would meet with GOV officials at whatever level the GOV determined, the Amb noted the relatively restricted current access to the GOV made it more difficult to address issues in our bilateral relationship. Rangel initially took a stand on reciprocity -- Amb Alvarez_ did not have much access in Washington -- but agreed to facilitate meetings with the Ministers of Interior/Justice, Foreign Relations, and Education. The Ambassador also raised the many USG programs/visits that have been turned down or withdrawn from by GOV officials; Rangel said this did not reflect GOV policy, but he agreed to review the list the Ambassador provided. In subsequent statements to the press, the Ambassador made clear that the GOV should listen to the criticisms made by human rights and press freedom NGOs regarding the new media law. End Summary.

2. (C) The Ambassador, joined by the DCM, met with Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel and chief of staff Amb Rene Arreaa on December 8. The Ambassador reminded Rangel that he had promised to assist the Ambassador in meeting key members of the GOV. He said that two months after presenting credentials, he had only met three cabinet ministers, two of whom had already resigned. The Ambassador stressed that he did not stand on protocol, and of course would be willing to meet with vice ministers or office directors -- with whomever the GOV designated who could speak with authority. Did this situation reflect, he asked, a lack of GOV interest in the bilateral relationship, or skittishness on the part of individual ministers? Neither, said Rangel, what it reflected was the GOV's concern that its Ambassador to the U.S., Amb. Bernardo Alvarez_, was not received at an appropriately high level in the USG; reciprocity was very important, as was rank.

3. (C) The Ambassador responded that Alvarez_ had never complained to him about lack of access; Rangel said that Alvarez_ had done so with him. Rangel urged that the USG look at improving Alvarez_' access within State and other agencies. The Ambassador repeated that in his case, he was not insisting on meeting with higher-ranking officials; he only wanted to be able to meet with officials who could discuss and act upon our various bilateral issues. Rangel eventually offered to facilitate meetings for the Ambassador with Interior Minister Chacon, new Foreign Minister Rodriguez, and Education Minister Isturiz.

4. (C) The Vice President asked about the recent denial of visas to a Venezuelan bicycling group; the Ambassador replied that the denial resulted from fraudulent documents, apparently on the letterhead of the Vice Ministry of Sports. The Sports Vice minister has ducked our requests for a meeting for six months; this incident underscored the need for bilateral meetings and dialogue. Rangel agreed.

5. (U) In responding to press queries after the visit about the new media content law, the Ambassador stressed that the GOV should listen to the observations and criticisms of the law made public by international human rights and press freedom groups.

6. (C) Comment: The Ambassador spoke to Amb. Alvarez_ in Washington after the meeting. Alvarez_ made clear that he and Rangel had discussed and coordinated the reciprocity argument before the meeting. The GOV has made its points about wanting higher level contact in Washington; that said, Rangel conceded that it would be good to facilitate some additional Embassy-Gov high level contacts. Rangel is loyal to his government and is no friend of the U.S., but he probably prefers more rather than less contact with the US Embassy.

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